

Message Text

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INFO USICA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
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USICA FOR PGM/P

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MOPS, LE, IS, SY
SUBJECT: ISRAELI PRESS ON LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

1. SUMMARY: THE "DETERIORATING" SITUATION IN LEBANON
AND VIEWS ON THE ADVISABILITY OF ISRAELI INTERVENTION
DOMINATE TODAY'S PRESS. THE MAJORITY OPINION IN THE
PRESS IS THAT ISRAEL HAS NO REASON TO INTERVENE IN
LEBANON AT THIS STAGE. THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEETINGS
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WITH MEMBERS OF THE KNESSET DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ARE REPORTED. FREQUENT GOI CONTACTS WITH THE
U.S. ON THE SITUATION ARE NOTED AND, ACCORDING TO
MAARIV'S HARIF, "AN ISRAELI WARNING (TO SYRIA) IS
EXPECTED." END SUMMARY

2. AL-HAMISHMAR (SHECHORI) REPORTS THAT THE SITUATION

IN LEBANON IS REGARDED IN JERUSALEM WITH "THE UTMOST GRAVITY." ONE OFFICIAL IS QUOTED AS DESCRIBING THE SITUATION AS "VERY TENSE, DIFFICULT AND UNPLEASANT." DAVAR (SHIMSHI) NOTES THAT "JERUSALEM HOPES THAT SYRIA WILL UNDERSTAND THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT BE ABLE TO TOLERATE THE GRAVE DEVELOPMENTS TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE CHRISTIANS. ISRAEL IS GREATLY INTERESTED IN STOPPING THE SYRIANS WITHOUT RISKING INVOLVEMENT IN THE FIGHTING, BUT ALSO WITHOUT ABANDONING THE CHRISTIANS TO THEIR FATE." SHIMSHI ADDS THAT "DURING THE LAST FEW DAYS THERE HAS BEEN INTENSIFIED DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY, WITH U.S. REPRESENTATIVES IN SYRIA AND ISRAEL TAKING A MOST ACTIVE PART. THE QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER ISRAEL WILL STOP THE SYRIANS IN THEIR NEW OFFENSIVE OR WHETHER IT WILL STAND IDLY BY. IN ISRAEL, THE MAIN CONTACTS WERE CONDUCTED BY THE U.S. MILITARY ATTACHE WITH THE HEADS OF THE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT. IT APPEARS THE AMERICANS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN LEBANON DERIVE FROM ACTION INITIATED BY THE SYRIANS, BUT IS DUE TO PROVOCATION BY CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS. THE U.S. HAS REQUESTED ISRAEL TO EXERCISE ITS INFLUENCE IN ORDER TO RESTRAIN THE CHRISTIANS, JUST AS ISRAEL HAS REQUESTED THE U.S. TO WARN THE SYRIANS."

3. HAARETZ' SCHIFF STATED THAT, ACCORDING TO "A MILITARY EVALUATION," ISRAEL DOES NOT HAVE A REASON AT THIS STAGE
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AND UNDER THE PRESENT MILITARY AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS TO INTERVENE DIRECTLY IN THE WAR IN LEBANON TO SAVE THE CHRISTIANS FROM THE SYRIAN ARMY. THIS IS ALSO THE EVALUATION OF AUTHORITATIVE CIRCLES WHO FOLLOW EVENTS IN LEBANON AND THE SYRIAN OFFENSIVE ON CHRISTIAN STRONGHOLDS. ACCORDING TO THIS EVALUATION, THE SYRIANS ARE ABSTAINING FROM ATTACKING CHRISTIAN CENTERS AND INSTEAD ARE OPERATING IN FRINGE AREAS, WHERE THERE ARE ALSO CONCENTRATIONS OF PRO-FRANJIAH CHRISTIANS. AT A LATER STAGE, IT IS POSSIBLE THE SYRIANS WILL CONTINUE THEIR OFFENSIVE ON THE MAIN CHRISTIAN CENTERS. HOWEVER, THE EVALUATION IS THAT THE CHRISTIANS HAVE A FAIR POWER OF RESISTANCE, HAVING BEEN EQUIPPED IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS WITH QUANTITIES OF ARMS, INCLUDING ANTI-TANK WEAPONS. UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS, IT IS BELIEVED THE CHRISTIANS CAN WITHSTAND SYRIAN ATTACKS, PROVIDED DAMASCUS DOES NOT REINFORCE ITS TROOPS IN LEBANON. THAT IS TO SAY, THE SYRIANS CAN OVERPOWER THE CHRISTIANS BY A GENERAL ATTACK OR IN STAGES, BUT ONLY AFTER THEY BRING ADDITIONAL FORCES FROM SYRIA. SCHIFF ASSUMES THAT AT THIS STAGE ISRAEL WILL LIMIT ITSELF TO RENDERING AID AND POLITICAL SUPPORT TO THE CHRISTIANS AND WILL FOLLOW THE SYRIAN

OFFENSIVE CLOSELY.

4. HATZOFE'S POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT NOTES THE DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE GOI REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ISRAELI INTERVENTION: "THE DEFENSE MINISTER IS AGAINST ISRAELI INTERVENTION IN LEBANON BECAUSE THIS WOULD MEAN AN OUTBREAK OF WAR ON ALL FRONTS. HE THINKS THAT THE CHRISTIANS OCCASIONALLY PROVOKE THE SYRIAN ARMY AND THUS AGGRAVATE THE SITUATION. POLITICAL ELEMENTS, ON THE OTHER HAND, THINK THAT IT IS THE SYRIAN ARMY WHICH IS PROVOKING THE CHRISTIANS." CONTINUING, HATZOFE REPORTS THAT THE ISRAELI POLITICAL-DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT IS

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DIVIDED REGARDING THE SITUATION IN LEBANON. SOME THINK THAT ISRAEL OUGHT TO DECIDE ON A "RED LINE" AND WARN THE SYRIANS AGAINST CROSSING THAT LINE. THEY BELIEVE

SUCH A WARNING WOULD BE CONDUCTIVE TO STOPPING THE SYRIAN ATTACKS. OTHERS, HOWEVER, BELIEVE SUCH A WARNING IS LIABLE TO INVOLVE ISRAEL IN A LENGTHY WAR IN LEBANON AND DIVERT ISRAEL'S ATTENTION FROM FACING THE THREAT OF A REAL WAR ON ALL FRONTS.

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5. QUOTING "SENIOR DEFENSE ELEMENTS," MAARIV'S EREZ REPORTS THAT ISRAEL'S POLICY IN LEBANON CONSISTS OF (A) RESISTING THE DEPLOYMENT OF SYRIAN FORCES TO SOUTHERN LEBANON; (B) RESISTING THE INFILTRATION OF TERRORISTS TO AREAS SOUTH OF THE LITANI RIVER; AND (C) PRESERVING THE ENCLAVES. AT THIS STAGE, ISRAEL WILL NOT INTERVENE IN LEBANON, DESPITE THE INTENSIFICATION OF SYRIAN OPERATIONS IN THE NORTH. AN AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE TOLD EREZ THAT "EVEN IF THE CAMP DAVID CONFERENCE WERE NOT IMMINENT, ISRAEL WOULD NOT TAKE DIRECT ACTION AGAINST THE SYRIANS IN LEBANON, BECAUSE SUCH ACTION WOULD MEAN WAR IN THIS REGION, WHICH IS A SECONDARY FRONT AS FAR AS ISRAEL IS CONCERNED."

6. HAARETZ' MARGALIT REPORTED ON THE MEETING BETWEEN FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON AND CHAIRMAN OF THE KNESSET SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ARENS AND THE PRIME MINISTER. THE LIKUD MEMBERS OF THE KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEBANON ALSO MET WITH BEGIN AND DISCUSSED "THE GRAVE SITUATION IN LEBANON." ARENS SAID, AFTER MEETING BEGIN, THAT ONE MUST NOT ALLOW THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CAMP DAVID CONFERENCE TO BE EXPLOITED BY THE SYRIANS TO LIQUIDATE THE CHRISTIANS IN LEBANON. MK PESSAH GROUPER, A MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEBANON, WAS EVEN MORE OUTSPOKEN, STATING, "AN ISRAEL ACTION IN CONNECTION WITH LEBANON WILL BE UNAVOIDABLE, IN ORDER TO PREVENT GENOCIDE AND HARM TO ISRAEL'S OWN SECURITY."

7. MAARIV'S HARIF ADDED THAT ISRAEL IS IN FREQUENT CONTACT WITH THE U.S. IN CONNECTION WITH PRESENT HAPPENINGS IN LEBANON IN AN ATTEMPT TO CONVEY THE ASSESSMENT THAT THE SYRIAN OBJECTIVE IS TO BREAK THE STRENGTH OF

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THE CHRISTIANS. IN CONTACTS MAINTAINED BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE U.S., THE AMERICANS HAVE NOT YET EVALUATED THE SITUATION IN LEBANON WITH THE SAME GRAVITY AS THE

ISRAELIS. HOWEVER, IT SEEMS THAT IN WASHINGTON, TOO, APPREHENSION IS FELT THAT THERE MAY BE A FLARE-UP ON THE SYRIAN-ISRAELI FRONT. HARIF NOTED THAT WITHIN A SHORT WHILE ISRAEL WILL VOICE A WARNING THAT IT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO STAND IDLY BY IF THE SYRIAN ACTIVITIES ENDANGERING ISRAEL'S SECURITY CONTINUE. POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN JERUSALEM ESTIMATE THAT SYRIA BELIEVES ISRAEL'S HANDS WILL BE TIED, OUT OF RELUCTANCE TO GET INVOLVED IN A MILITARY OPERATION DURING THE CAMP DAVID CONFERENCE, AND THIS APPARENTLY ENCOURAGED THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES TO INTENSIFY SYRIA'S ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON, INCLUDING THE CAPTURE OF LEBANESE VILLAGES BY HELICOPTER-BORNE COMMANDO FORCES.

8. YEDIOT'S ZIMUKI STATES THAT THE OPINION EXISTS IN JERUSALEM THAT THE AMERICANS SILENTLY SUPPORT SYRIA'S ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON BECAUSE THEY WANT TO DRAW PRESIDENT ASSAD AWAY FROM THE SOVIET UNION TO THEIR SIDE. HE REPORTS THAT AT THIS STAGE ISRAEL IS NOT CONSIDERING TAKING DIRECT MILITARY STEPS AGAINST THE SYRIANS. HOWEVER, IF THE SITUATION IN LEBANON GETS WORSE AND THERE IS A VERY REAL DANGER TO THE CHRISTIANS, IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO CONSIDER THE USE OF "NON-DIPLOMATIC" MEANS. IT IS ALSO POINTED OUT IN JERUSALEM THAT IF THE SYRIANS TAKE OVER MT. LEBANON, THIS WOULD AMOUNT TO A CHANGE IN THE STRATEGIC SET-UP THAT WOULD REQUIRE RENEWED STRATEGIC EVALUATION IN ISRAEL.

9. DAVAR EDITORIALIZES THAT ISRAEL IS OBLIGATED TO STICK TO A CLEAR ORDER OF PRIORITIES, WHICH ACCORDS DIFFERENT DEGREES OF IMPORTANCE EVEN TO EVENTS WHICH

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WOULD ENDANGER SECURITY: (ISRAEL MUST) TRY TO DETER
THE SYRIANS FROM LARGE-SCALE ACTION AGAINST THE
CHRISTIANS IN THE NORTH; MOBILIZE POLITICAL SUPPORT IN
THE WEST TO THAT END; AND ASSIST THE CHRISTIANS IN
THEIR ABILITY TO HOLD THEIR OWN WHILE MAKING IT CLEAR
THAT ISRAEL WILL NOT BE DRAGGED INTO AN ALL-OUT WAR
AGAINST SYRIA AT A TIME AND PLACE NOT OF ITS CHOOSING.
"AT A TIME OF REAL DANGER TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY, IT IS
PERMISSIBLE EVEN TO IGNORE THE SUMMIT CONFERENCE AT
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CAMP DAVID, BUT 'HERE AND NOW' IT IS STILL A LONG WAY
FROM SUCH DANGER. THIS BEING SO, THE SITUATION IN LEBANON
MUST BE REGARDED AS SECONDARY IN IMPORTANCE TO THE POLI-
TICAL NEGOTIATIONS..."

10. HATZOFÉ EDITORIALIZED THAT "ONE HAS TO SEE ALL THE
ASPECTS OF ISRAELI INTERVENTION IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS.
SYRIA'S INTEREST AT THE MOMENT IS TO DISTURB THE PEACE
TALKS AT CAMP DAVID THROUGH A CONTROLLED PROVOCATION
OF ISRAEL." NEVERTHELESS, "SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS OF
PRIMARY IMPORTANCE OBLIGATE ISRAEL NOT TO TOLERATE
ABSOLUTE SYRIAN TAKE-OVER IN LEBANON."

11. IN ADDITION, MAARIV NOTED ASSAD'S WARNING TO ISRAEL
AND, REFERRING TO THE EXPLOSIVE SITUATION IN LEBANON,
ADVOCATES "FIRMNESS AND CAUTION." HART

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